

Foundation Contributes to Park Effort Town of Merrimac Raises 100% of Fundraising Goal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(MERRIMAC, WI) - The Bart & Char Olson Foundation recently contributed another \$10,000 to the Town of Merrimac bringing their total contribution to the Town's Clingman property purchase to \$20,000. The donation caps a 3-year effort to raise contributions for the Town's first park and the largest park on Lake Wisconsin.

The Town raised \$260,000 through private donations and a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Lake Protection Grant to purchase the property for conservation and park space on Lake Wisconsin. The town purchased the property on November 7, 2003. The town achieved its goal of purchasing this property without levying additional taxes against the local property owners.

The property is one of the last truly undeveloped parts of Lake Wisconsin along its northern shore. The natural surroundings create one of the oldest growth forests on Lake Wisconsin as well as one of the largest undeveloped shorelines on the lake. The DNR purchased an adjacent Clingman property and anticipates it will receive the Badger Army Ammunition Plant (BAAP) Pump House property when the United States Army transfers ownership in the near future. The town hopes to acquire an additional 5 acres for the park when Hwy. 78 is relocated in 2007. In total, the future of this park area will contain just over 17 acres of property with over ½ mile of shoreline.

In December of 2003, the Town created a Park Development Fee. The fee requires developers to pay \$485 per lot, or housing unit, to pay for the acquisition and maintenance of parks in the Town. SWS, Inc. of Plain, Wisconsin recently subdivided the Lakeview Estates Condominiums into a subdivision. Lakeview Estates was created prior to the enactment of the ordinance, but became eligible for the fee as a result of the new subdivision. The \$29,000 in fees paid will first reimburse the Town for expenses it incurred acquiring the property and the remainder will be held in a park fund. Devil's Head Resort is also planning adding condominiums and is eligible for the fee as well.

The town plans to work out an arrangement with the DNR to manage the property along with the other lands it has acquired next door. Some of the early vision for the park shows the town's portion mainly being used for fishing access, hiking trails and nature observation points. The DNR has a long range vision of providing day camping sites and possibly boat access on its portion. Throughout the bay, the DNR has also budgeted for improving the fish habitat with off shore reefs and fish cribs. DNR officials are cautious about their future plans as these projects take funding and might not be able to happen for several years.

The town will withhold on any major developments on the property until BAAP is resolved, the town will start cleaning up some abandoned buildings in the spring of this year. The Town is also negotiating with Walleye North America, a major contributor already, to construct a handicap accessible fishing pier after the Hwy. 78 project is complete.

The initiative of purchasing land by the Town of Merrimac for conservation is unique in that these projects are generally seen at the county or state level. The township's effort to conserve this property might be one of the first for a local township. While other municipalities (such as cities and villages) and counties often preserve park space it is rarely been seen at the township level.

This effort was recognized by the National Heritage Land Trust with a Stewardship Award in 2004.